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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: STATEMENT ON THE STATE OF  
MEDIA FREEDOM IN THE OSCE

11. (U) Post is authorized to present the following statement  
at the February 4, 2010 Permanent Council meeting in Vienna.  
Begin text:

Thank you, Mister Chairman,

On numerous occasions, the United States has taken the floor  
here to address serious and specific concerns regarding media  
freedom in various OSCE countries.

In his speech in Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize,  
President Obama said we need to build a world where peace  
rests on the inherent rights and dignities of every  
individual. Our earliest OSCE commitments set forth this  
same principle, as do a host of Ministerial Decisions and  
Summit Declarations on media freedom, freedom of expression,  
and the safety of journalists that we have collectively  
passed - of our own volition, by our own choice, and through  
our own doing - in the years since the Final Act in Helsinki  
in 1975.

Sadly, today, we again take the floor -- not to address the  
wrongs done to an individual journalist or a penalty imposed  
upon a single media outlet, but rather to draw our collective  
attention to the grave threats gathering in the OSCE area -  
and, as a consequence, to this organization - from increased  
perils faced daily by individual journalists and others  
exercising their universal right to freedom of expression,  
which range from violence perpetrated against them with  
impunity, to the all too frequent criminalization of speech;  
from overly harsh prison sentences or outrageously punitive  
fines on media outlets, to outright government hostility  
towards the exercise of freedom of speech and efforts to  
censor opinions that are not shared by government  
bureaucrats.

Many respected international organizations, including Freedom  
House, Reporters Without Borders and others have warned of  
the backsliding we have witnessed in the last ten years in  
media freedom in the OSCE region. A full 22 of our  
participating States are currently ranked as either Partly  
Free or Not Free by Freedom House. Sadly, many citizens in  
participating States have become inured to the unceasing  
litany of brutalities and other pressures faced by  
journalists. We have become accustomed to reports that a  
media outlet has been fined millions of Euros for remarks  
perceived as insulting by a government ) indeed, by more  
than one government seated at this table. Selective or harsh  
application of bureaucratic procedures and tax  
investigations, and the sometimes crippling fines that  
result, threaten the sustainability of independent or  
opposition media outlets. The utter lack of results from  
most of the investigations into violence against journalists  
has become the default response of governments determined to  
manage and control access to information by their own  
citizens in print, on television or via the internet.

In her recent speech on internet freedom, U.S. Secretary of  
State Hillary Clinton spoke of an "urgent need" to protect  
freedom of expression, including the digital frontier of the

21st century and called the "freedom to connect" to global information networks an on-ramp to modernity.<sup>8</sup> As we witness the transformation of the media toward new technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging, some governments have seized chances to control these methods under the pretext of national security.

Another worrisome development is the increasing lack of pluralism in media ownership that in some parts of the OSCE. When the vast majority of public information - be it in print or broadcast media - passes through just a few individual gateways, controlled either by governments or by private firms that hew a government line, the result is a media environment tending toward canned messaging and propaganda that falls short of our democratic aspirations and principles.

As we raised at the Permanent Council on October 29, 2009, we remain disturbed that the numbers of civil lawsuits and criminal charges being brought against journalists on trumped-up charges of violating state secrets, defamation, hooliganism, or "moral damages" has increased substantially in some participating States who seek to use the law as a way to control or intimidate the media.

Among the most distressing trends is the physical danger faced by increasing numbers of journalists that often goes unchecked. In one OSCE country, 19 journalists have been killed since the year 2000, with only two convictions resulting in these cases. In one Central Asian country, last year alone, more than eight journalists were violently assaulted and two were murdered. In both countries, as in too many other OSCE participating States, inadequate responses by the governments and poor investigations promulgate an attitude of impunity and provide encouragement to others to opt for violence against journalists who threaten to expose their activities.

We are pleased that two OSCE countries, in keeping with their OSCE commitments, have recently opted to decriminalize speech. Even though their laws had not been used for a considerable period of time, the decision to remove them from the books is an example of adhering to both the spirit and the letter of our common commitments.

In the spirit that brought us inspiringly close to a decision on media freedom in Athens, we urge all participating States, and particularly those who were unable to join consensus on that decision, to commit anew this year to respect the right of our citizens to receive and impart information freely and without undue governmental interference.

In that same spirit, and as we move forward with the cross-dimensional Corfu Process throughout the coming year, we urge our fellow participating States to engage creatively in finding new mechanisms to strengthen the OSCE's role in guarding media freedom and promoting full implementation of OSCE commitments in this area.

Mr. Chairman, I am aware that it is unusual to address the Permanent Council in this manner. But we must not let the extraordinary dangers confronting the media in too many participating States become routine. The United States calls upon all OSCE participating States to give deep and serious consideration to the commitments we have undertaken; to recognize that until there is true freedom of expression, there can be no true and lasting security.

Thank you Mister Chairman.

END TEXT  
CLINTON